DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 405 CS 504 972

AUTHOR Swanson, Charles H.
TITLE Their Success is Your Success: Teach Them to Listen.
PUB DATE 19 Oct 84
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the West Virginia Community College Association (Charleston, WV, October 19, 1984).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aural Learning; *Classroom Techniques; Communication Skills; Language Processing; *Listening Comprehension; Listening Habits; *Listening Skills; Speech Communication; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The techniques for effective listening can be identified by the acronym PAT, which stands for three sets of techniques--physical, attitude, and thinking. Four kinds of physical techniques promote effective listening: appropriate eye contact and normal blinking rate, facial feedback, appropriate body language, and appropriate verbal feedback. Two attitudes of the effective listener are selfishness, i.e., there must be something in this for me personally, and a lack of avoidance, while thinking strategies for effective listening involve being aware of nonverbal cues, studying organizational patterns of the communication delivered, and taking notes. Finally, a monitoring scale can provide feedback to students about their listening performance. (Appendixes contain references, a bibliography, and tables showing (1) listening skill use and listening skill instruction, and (2) the amount of time teachers spend teaching and students spend listening.) (EL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED259405

THEIR SUCCESS IS YOUR SUCCESS: TEACH THEM TO LISTEN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

by

CHARLES H. SWANSON
Professor and Coordinator
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre
Fairmont State College
Fairmont, West Virginia

Presented as a
"Spotlight Presentation"
at the Annual Conference of the
West Virginia Community College Association
Charleston, West Virginia
October 19, 1984

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Charles H. Swanson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 504972

"LISTEN, PLEASE!" "Why don't they listen?" Students foul up directions and assignments: they misunderstand our best lectures. Why can't they listen?

After a presentation on listening by Dr. Lewis Rutherford from Parkersburg Community College, I listen to myself and my colleagues make complaints such as those above. Dr. Rutherford spoke about listening to the 1979 State Speech Association Conference and his presentation really caught my ear. As Lewis Rutherford spoke, I realized that I had been teaching communication courses -- speech, English and drama -- for 20 years, and had never said much of anything about listening.

Dr. Rutherford presented the results of a communication study by Paul T. Rankin in 1928. Rankin asked a group of adults to log how much time was spent using each basic communication skill--reading, writing, speaking and listening-during each day for an extended period. Rankin discovered that the average adult spent 70 percent of his or her waking day using one or more of his or her basic communication skills. Furthermore, Rankin discovered that the average adult spent 75 percent of every communication day using the skills of speaking and listening (see Appendix

1). Rankin went a step further and examined the instructional time devoted to teaching each of the basic communication skills. He discovered that the schools committed virtually all of their communication skills instructional time to teaching the skill of reading and writing: speaking and listening received very little instructional time. Most studies since 1928 have revealed no change in Rankin's findings. Paul Rankin discovered what I have come to call the "inverted curriculum": the instructional emphasis of most American schools remains obsessed with those communication skills--reading and writing--which will be least used. We cannot assume that someone else has taught our students to listen; usually they haven't. The students don't listen because they can't listen.

Lewis Rutherford concluded his presentation that day in 1979 by holding up a two-page national magazine advertisement by Sperry Corporation. That advertisement challenged HOW CAN WE EXPECT HIM TO LEARN WHEN WE HAVEN'T EVEN TAUGHT HIM TO LISTEN?

The simple question motivated much of my research into the skill of listening. One early discovery was that, as teachers, we talk and we assume that the students are listening. Studies revealed that teachers talked from 54 percent of the classtime in elementary school to 67 percent (up to 96 percent in English classes) in high school. Most college classes tend to be lectures requiring the students to listen over 90 percent of the classtime. By contrast, students without listening training tend to have their listening

skills erroded through their public school experience. One study revealed that 90 percent of first graders were listening when the teacher interrupted herself to check listening. About 80 percent of second-graders when checked were listening to the teacher. By the time those students are in junior high, only 47 percent are listening. In high school, a devastating 28 percent of students checked were listening to teacher (see Appendix 2). One wonders how many college students are listening. Clearly, if the students have not learned to listen, they cannot listen to learn.

About that time, I reflected on my own student career. I remembered how my grades remained at the C level until my friend who was taking the same courses as I, and getting A's or B's with less effort, told me that I was not really listening. Thus, I embarked on learning the art of listening as a student, and my grades rose. Ironically, upon entering the ranks of teachers, I forgot those important lessons in listening. I forgot that some students learn how to listen in class; most students don't learn to listen. Then, I realized that if my students do better, I look better. THEIR SUCCESS IS MY SUCCESS: TEACH THEM TO LISTEN. I believe a simple lesson in classroom listening will improve most student performances, and thus improve teacher performance. One of the first studies I examined declared STUDENTS WHO GET GOOD GRADES ARE NOT SMARTER, THEY LISTEN BETTER.

The first time I taught our new listening skills courses, I taught about listening--not how to listen. Finally, one young man said "but how

do I listen? What do I do?"

One of my sources I quoted said "you can become a good listener by acting like a good listener". That young man replies, "Yes, but what does a good listener do?"

The good listener has a repetorie of techniques which he or she uses to achieve effective listening. A skill is a complex of techniques and behaviors from which the performer selects in order to complete specific tasks in specific situations. The techniques used by the effective listener are so simple and obvious that we tend to assume that everyone already knows them: unfortunately, most students do not know these techniques. When students learn these techniques, they usually say something like, "this is so simple. Why didn't someone tell me about this long ago?"

These two facts revealed how active the listener should be and why most people don't listen very well. The average person speaks at a rate of around 150 words per minute; while the average listener can listen to at least 450 words per minute. These two facts reveal how active the listener should be and why most people don't listen very well. Most people listen momentarily and wander off mentally during the deadair time, waiting for the speaker's next words; they wander in and out of the speaker's talk with no knowledge of how to use their extra listening time. If the listener does not use the advantage of thought-listening speed, that listener's mind tends to wander off, rarely to return to the speaker. The activity of concentrating on the speaker and responding to that speaker is

considerable.

Simple and concrete motivation for student listening can be provided because the purpose of listening in the classroom is to get better grades. The prospect of better grades with less effort should be motivation enough for almost all students.

To be fair, the students must be warned that active and responsive listening does not work with all teachers. About 10-15 percent of the teachers any student faces are liable to be incomprehensible or dangerous. Some teachers don't know what they are doing. Some teachers begin to attack when they discover someone is listening. With such teachers, all students should hide and protect themselves.

Most students do not have to merely put up with being bored. If the students really act like effective listeners, most teachers tend to improve their performance. Most people tend to improve their speaking performance when they discover that someone is really listening. Sometimes the students' problem is finding ways to let the teacher know that they are listening: that can be done. Students can improve or stop a teacher by the way that these students listen.

Effective listening in the classroom is built on foundation of techniques which anyone can learn. These foundational techniques can be identified by the acronym. PAT. Get your listening techniques down PAT.

The PAT approach to listening is built around three sets of techniques -- physical, attitude and thinking. Each set of techniques contributed to the complexity of the skill known as listening.

I. PHYSICAL TECHNIQUES:

Listening begins with certain physical techniques which cause the mind to function appropriately. Remember, when a person acts like an effective listener, that person becomes an effective listener. Thus, students must learn how to act like an effective listener, or a "good student". Four kinds of physical techniques promote effective listening; they involve the eyes, the face, the body and the mouth of the listener.

A. EYE TECHNIQUES:

Interestingly, the effective listener uses his or her eyes to increase listening effectiveness. First, the blink rate of the effective listener remains high. The average blink rate of most persons, except those wearing hard contact lens, is usually set at about one blink every 3 to 5 seconds. When the blink rate exceeds 5 seconds, the non-blinker tends to be daydreaming. The non-blinker's mind is usually in outer space. Thus, the effective listener increases the rate of blinking as distractions develop. A second listener-eye technique, during face-to-fact communication, involves eye contact. Appropriate eye contact increases listening effectiveness. If the listener makes no eye contact, the speaker has no way to know whether the message was communicated. Much of the speaker's

message is found at the non-verbal level; thus, the listener must keep a careful eye on the speaker. However, if the listener's eye contact exceeds the cultural norm of 15 to 20 seconds, the listener's staring may distract the speaker. Consequently, the effective listener makes solid eye contact for 15 to 20 seconds, surveys the environment briefly, and then returns to monitor the speaker. Both blinking and eye contact help the listener concentrate on the whole message.

B. FACE TECHNIQUES:

Using facial expressions keep the listener focused on the message as well as providing feedback to the speaker. Untrained listeners tend to assume that they can keep their faces expressionless and still listen. As teachers, we all know what it is like to try to communicate with a classroom full of dead fish.

Effective listeners use their faces to focus on the message. If the listener is going to respond appropriately to the speaker's message, attention must be intense. Consequently, as the listener strives to respond, that purpose focuses attention.

Feedback is an important part of effective communication. Listeners recognize the importance of feedback. Thus, effective listeners expend considerable effort to provide the speaker with clear facial feedback. I recommend that student practice a variety of appropriate facial expressions,-- such as, interest, amazement, puzzlement, confusion -- in a mirror to make certain that their responses can be seen by the

speaker. A clearly present expression of puzzlement often can use the speaker to clarify his/her self immediately and thus to save compounded confusions.

C. BODY TECHNIQUES:

Similarly, the listener's body also focuses attention and provides feedback. If a listener reclines while listening, the body's signal to the brain is "naptime". The effective listener maintains an erect and alert posture. Posture reflects the mental stage of the listener. When supposed listener faces a speaker with arms and legs crossed, that listener is closed and defensive: no message is going to penetrate such defenses. Listeners must be aware of defensive barriers and learn to open their posture. Most speakers are aware of those body messages and respond automatically to the listener's signals.

An effective listener recognizes that a person who is completely stationary or unmoving, becomes a statue. A statue cannot listen. Movement can be used also as a prompting device by the listener. When the listener catches his or her thoughts wandering from the speaker, a definite body shift can be used to re-focus on the speaker. Passiveness of the listener's body leads to passivity and inertness of the brain.

D. MOUTH TECHNIQUES:

Most students remember those most frequest listening lessons in school, "shut up and listen" and "be quiet and listen" which serve only to confuse students. Effective listeners use their mouths appropriately.

They have discovered with whom they should speak and when to speak, because the sender may need explicit verbal or vocalic forms of feedback. Verbal responses on the part of the listener are intended to clarify the speaker's message. Questions or brief statements by the listener can cause further explanation when needed. Non-verbal feedback can be provided through the use of vocalics. Vocalics are sounds which are not words yet yet do communicate. Such sounds as, laughter, Un huh, oh, hum, huh?, do communicate. One dangerous sound is the repetitious "un huh". That sound repeated too much can rock the listener to sleep. The listener does need to be aware of the power of oral feedback.

Oral feedback can be dangerous; consequently you must warn the students. Some teachers are completely intolerant of any oral feedback: they consider oral feedback to be impertinent or offensive. Another, even more dangerous, teacher is the teacher who invites discussion or comment by the student and then attacks the responder. I believe that students should be warned that even the effective listener learns to keep his or her mouth closed around such dangerous teachers.

II. ATTITUDE TECHNIQUES:

Attitude is crucial in all forms of human performance, and especially in listening. Unfortunately, most people seem to believe that they are stuck with whatever attitude they have; that whatever attitude they hold is beyond their control. Effective listeners know that they do control their own attitudes and that they can adopt a positive and constructive attitude.

Two attitudes are essential to the effective listener. The effective listener adopts attitudes of selfishness and avoiding avoidance.

A. SELFISHNESS:

Selfishness works as a positive attitude in the listener. A selfish listener acts with an attitude that "if I am going to listen, there has to be something for me personally." With such an attitude, the listener searches every message for value. By contrast, poor listeners tend either to demand speaker brilliance or to expect boredom. Consequently selfishness in the receiver promotes effective listening.

B. AVOID AVOIDANCE:

Avoidance is a natural human characteristic. Many psychologists characterize humans as naturally seeking the least amount of pain or effort. Most people tend to avoid hard messages as they seek the path of least resistance. Effective listeners, in contrast, recognize that the ear and the mind require exercise in order to deal with difficult materials when such listening is required. Those people who have avoided hard oral messages discover that they are not equipped to listen to such messages in the classroom. Effective listeners seek out opportunities to test their listening skills on new and difficult oral messages.

III. THINKING TECHNIQUES:

Thinking is definitely a part of the skill of listening. Students

need to know what to think about as they listen. Primary to the thinking process of the effective listener - students is the constant presence of their motivation---to get better grades. If the students are pursuing better grades, they should be constantly searching for cues as to what they must learn. If they can identify the subtle cues which most teachers transmit, they should be able to identify more precisely what they must learn. As these students become more effective, their grades (as indicators of their learning) should rise. (When the students' performance improve, the teacher's performance appears better).

A. NON-VERBAL CUES:

Non-verbal cues by the teacher are the first thing about which students must think. Most teachers have learned consciously or sub-consciously to emphasize the main points of their lesson with some kind of non-verbal reinforcement. Among the various kinds of non-verbal reinforcers are voice changes in volume or intensity, gestures, movements, or writing on the board. I usually warn my students that three out of four things I write on the board most likely will appear on a test. One of my students from my listening skill class discovered that one Fairmont State College faculty member backs up when emphasizing important points. The students must recognize that almost every teacher uses his or her own cueing system: identifying such cueing helps pinpoint potential test questions.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS:

Students need to study how much teacher organizes the class

material. Very often, the teacher's organizational pattern reveals the persons viewpoint. Once I had a professor who emphasized transitions between points during his lectures: my emphasis on transitions in the exam essays earned me an A grade. Once, the teacher's viewpoint is understood, their test-making and grading proclivities are understood; then, anticipating the test questions and grading tendencies will improve the students' performance.

C. NOTE-TAKING:

Many students are confused when they try to take class notes with the same note style for all teachers. As the teachers organizational styles vary, the student's notetaking style must change. Consequently, students need to be aware of the purpose of notetaking.

Notetakirg is a purposeful recording of those ideas, terms and facts which may be needed to be recalled for exams. Probably the most common student-problem is taking too many notes. A lecture should not be like the old saw, that a lecture is "the fastest way to get notes from the teacher's notebook to the student notebook without passing through either brain". The notes should be selected reminders of the lecture which can be expanded at some time shortly after the lecture. When the students really listen to a lecture they will discover less need for copious notes. The student must listen; otherwise, he or she may be so busy writing that they didn't hear a thing.

There are other dimensions to the thinking involved in listening; but the above materials must be tightly packed in order to fit in one class hour.

Finally, I am offering a monitoring scale which can provide feedback to students about their listening performance. This monitoring system can be used formally as a part of the class grade (as I do in my listening skill courses) or informally as a non-graded feedback--a number of fingers could be flashed to any student as an indicator of his or her performance in that class.

The monitor scale is based on a five point scale. The student listening performance is rated in terms of:

5----active virtually all of the time
4----active around 75% of the time
3----active around 50% of the time
2----active less than 25% of the time
0----absent

The greatest problem for the teacher is making the time to signal or note the student performance scores at the end of the class.

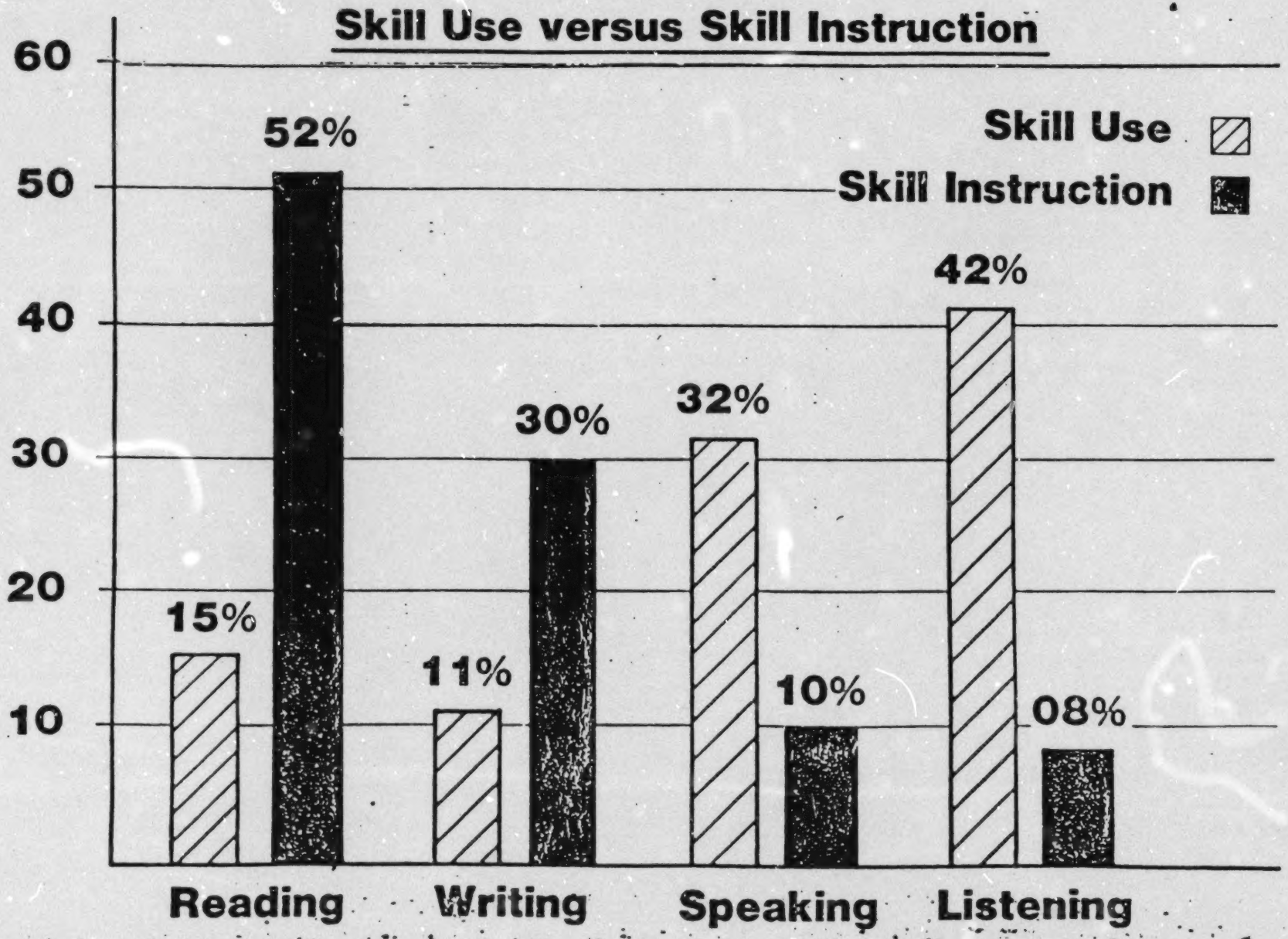
CONCLUSION:

Listening is essential in most classrooms. When a teacher begins to lecture assuming that the students already know how to listen, that teacher is playing against odds which are stacked against him or her. The cold, cruel facts are that very few students know how to listen.

What transpires between a teacher and the students should be a mutual effort to increase the learning in that classroom. Classrooms in which a win-lose situation develops usually means that the students lose. When the students lose, the teacher loses.

Taking one class hour to assure that the students do know how to listen increases the students' chance for success. When the students succeed, the teacher succeeds. Few of us who teach would suffer from too much success.

Appendix 1


Skill Use versus Skill Instruction
60
50
40
30
20
10
Skill Use
Skill Instruction
52%
15%
11%
30%
32%
10%
42%
08%
Reading
Writing
Speaking
Listening

APPENDIX 1

Original Source:

Paul T. Rankin, "The Importance of Listening", English Journal, 19(October 1928), 623-630.

Replicated:

D. Bird, "Teaching Listening Comprehension", Journal of the American Dietetic Association, 30(March, 1954), 225-230.

Tom Burns, "The Directions of Activity and Communication in a Departmental Executive Group," Human Relations, 7(1954), 73-97.

L. Breiter, "Research in Listening and Its Importance to Literature" Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1957.

John R. Hinrichs, "Communication Activity of Industrial Research Personnel," Personnel Psychology, 17(1964), 193-204.

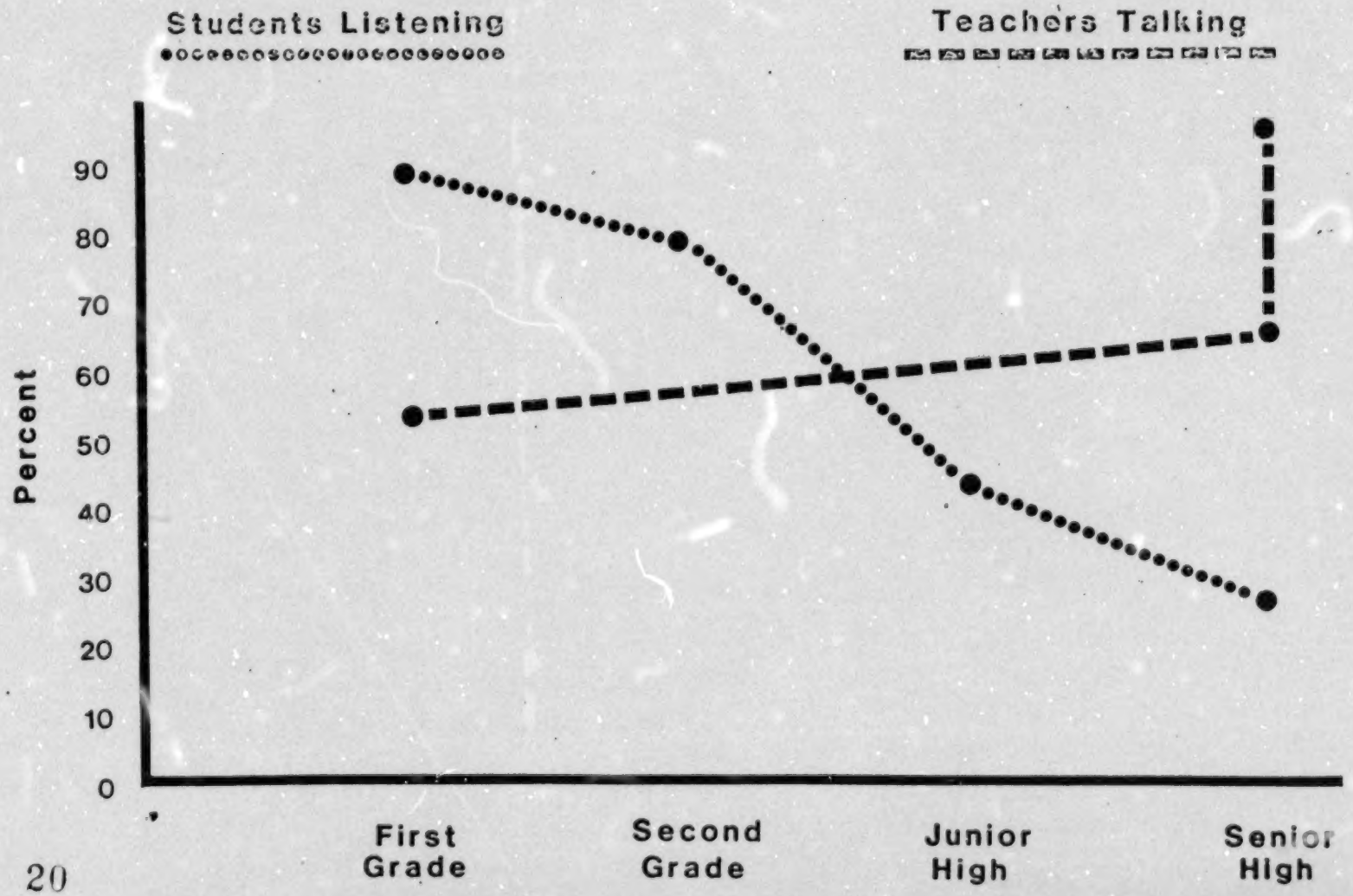
E. T. Klemmer and F. W. Snyder, "Measurement of Time Spent Communicating, "Journal of Communication, 22(June 1972), 148-158.

E. K. Werner, "A Study of Communication Time". Master's Thesis: University of Maryland, College Park, 1975.

L. Barker, R. Edwards, C. Gains, K. Gladney, & F. Holley, "An Investigation of Proportional Time Spent in Various Communication Activities by College Students", Journal of Applied Communication Research, 8(1980), 101-109.

Appendix 2

Teachers Talking & Students Listening



APPENDIX 2

SOURCES:

STUDENTS LISTENING: Ralph G. Nichols and Leonard Stevens: Are You Listening? (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), 12-13.

TEACHERS TALKING: Markgarf, Bruce R.: "An Observational Study Determining the Amount of Time that Students in the Tenth and Twelfth Grades are Expected to Listen in the Classroom". Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1957.

Wilt, Miriam E., "A Study of Teacher Awareness of Listening as a Factor in Elementary Education", Ph.d. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1949.

Gladfelder, Mary D. "Reviews of the Status of Listening Skills and Implications for Classroom Teachers." Master's Thesis Drake University, 1970.

LISTENING

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS, PAMPHLETS AND MONOGRAPHS.

Barker, Larry L.: Listening Behavior. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971. (Out of Print).

Ernest, Franklin H. Who's Listening? Vallejo, California: Addresso'set, 1973.

Friedman, Paul G.: Listening Processes: Attention, Understanding, Evaluation. What Research Says to the Teacher. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1978.

Getting, Baxter and Corinne: How to Listen Assertively. New York: Monarch Press, 1976.

Girzaitis, Loretta: Listening: A Response Ability. Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's College Press, 1972.

Nichols, Ralph G. and Leonard A. Stevens: Are You Listening? New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957.

Steil, Lyman K., Larry L. Barker, Kittie W. Watson: Effective Listening: Key to Your Success. Reading, Massachussets: Addison-Wesley, 1983. (now published by Random House)

Steil, Lyman K., Joanne Summerfield and George deMare: Listening: It Can Change Your Life. New York: (paperback published by McGraw Hill; hardcover by John Wiley & Sons, 1983).

Swanson, Charles H.: Learning Power: Better Grades Through Better Listening. Fairmont, West Virginia: C.B.K. Publishers, Box 1332, 1981.

Weaver, Carl H. Human Listening: Processes and Behavior. New York: Bobs-Merrill, 1972.

Weiss, Harvey: Teaching Effective Listening: A collection of Lesson Plans, Materials, Bibliographies ... K-12 and Beyond. Plymouth, Minnesota: Lend Me Your Ear, Inc. (2845 Medicine Road), 1981.

Wolff, Florence I., Nadine C. Marsnik, William S. Tracey and Ralph G. Nichols: Perceptive Listening, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983.

Wolvin, Andrew D., Carolyn Gwynn Coakley: Listening, Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1982.

Wolvin, Andrew D., Carolyn Gwynn Coakley: Listening Instruction. Theory and Research into Practice. Falls Church, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, 1971.